

Clicking with Cats

Key Points:

- Can teach cats, who are more timid, to come to the front of the cage
- Adopters see the cat engaging with them
- Provides enrichment and socialization

The shelter environment is especially stressful to cats. We cannot always do much about the physical environment, but we can change the mental environment in an instant. Clicker Training is a good way to do it. With cats we need not use the clicker to 'train' the cat in the traditional sense; we can use it to enrich the cat's environment, to give it some control over its world, and if possible to widen its own perceptions of that world. We are communicating to the cat so the cat can learn healthy ways to communicate back.

You will need:

- A highly preferred food treat, such as canned tuna - or somewhat less messily, tuna in a pouch
- Clicker
- A pencil, chopstick, popsicle stick, or dowel, to serve as a target

“Touch the Target” Steps:

1. Approach the liveliest cat in the cat room. Look at the cat, click, and push a pea-sized piece of tuna, treat, or other desirable wet food into the cage. (No bigger: the object is to please the cat, not to feed it a meal).

2. Wait for the cat to eat the treat. If it doesn't eat, go to another cat immediately. You can come back to that one. If the cat eats the treat, click and treat two more times.

3. Hold the end of your target up to the cage front, near the cat. The cat will sniff at it (if it doesn't, position the target closer to the cat's nose.) Click at the instant the nose touches the target. Treat. Wait for the cat to eat.

4. Repeat a couple of times, and then move the target slightly, in various directions, clicking and treating for each touch.

5. See if you can get the cat up on its hindquarters to reach the target, or click it for batting at the target. **Jackpot! (give extra treats).**

6. Move on to another cat.

7. Repeat later in the day or on another day, as time permits.

NOTE: Develop other opportunities to click. Use the target to lead the cat in or out of the cage, or out of the way during cleaning.

“Touch the Target”: Benefits

The targeting game can be played in very short sessions, with one cat or several, frequently or just occasionally, and by one person or several people. In the clicker game the animal learns for itself how to make good things happen. That gives cats something to look forward to.

Clicker games teach cats how to interact appropriately with humans. Confidence replaces fear. The cat discovers new skills and learns to adapt to new events. These are modest but fundamental changes that increase a cat's adoptability and the likelihood of an adoption becoming permanent.